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ABSTRACT

Directions for a game which models the feudal system of 11th century Europe are presented for high school and college history courses. The game demonstrates the medieval dependency of social structure on land holdings and vassal obligations. It also permits the expression of personal ambition, with results dependent on the loyalty and permissiveness of others in society. The importance of the "upward" responsibility of the vassal and the necessity of the lord's fulfilling his "downward" responsibility are demonstrated. The game requires 20 time periods and involves 36 players: 4 viscounts with 8 barons each. Definitions of terms used during the medieval period, the dependency status of players, and procedures for playing are outlined. The major direction the game can take is either toward greater unity or toward disintegration. (KC)

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FEUDAL NEXUS

Written by Stephen P. Hueston

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FEUDAL NEXUS

This model simulates the infeudation process in western Europe during the eleventh century. It demonstrates the dependency of social structure on land holdings and vassal obligations. The model permits multiple infeudation with resulting complexity. It also permits the expression of personal amibition with results dependent on the loyalty and permissiveness of others in the society. An attempt is made to demonstrate particularly the importance of the "upward" responsibility of the vassal, as well as the necessity of the lord fulfilling his "downward" responsibility.

The operation of this model includes three levels of the feudal structure, with the majority of those involved having both "upward" and "downward" obligations.

Feudal Nexus is designed to operate for twenty time periods. At the termination, the initial "pyramidal" structure should have evolved into a complex interwoven nexus.

The best number of players is 36, four viscounts with 8 barons each. Four good names for the viscounties are: Bearn, Bremule, Foix and Grandpre. All four of these are small counties in the southwest of France. There should be no more than one D3 Baron per Viscount and no more than two D2 barons. Status

can either be randomly selected or assigned by the instructor.

The instructor will also have to provide markers of some kind to indicate ownership and status of manors. I have provided a sample. This should be copied and reproduced, at least 12 should be made for each student. Each student will need ten to begin with and others will be needed to replace lost ones.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are important for an understanding of the rules and the historical period.

Alloidal Land - Freehold land remaining with the player throughout the entire operation of the model (his personal holding).

Attack - Initiation of conflict between two feudal equals, Viscount against Viscount or Baron against Baron.

Baron - Noble enfiefed by Viscount and lord of several knights.

Domain - Manors of a Viscount that can be used to enfief knights directly.

Enfiefment - Granting of land for use by another in exchange for service obligations.

Escheatment - Reclaimation of enfiefed land.

Felony - Conviction (declaration) by lord of the failure by a vassal to fulfill proper service obligation.

Freeholding - Owned land with no service obligation attached.

Knight - Unit in model enfiefed by Baron or Viscount.

Liege Lord - The lord that a Baron, owing more than one service obligation, owes primary

responsibility to. The lord enfiefing the Baron first.

Lord - Person enfiefing another.

Manor - Indivisible unit of land which is capable of supporting one mounted armed warrior.

Power Struggle - A model term representing internal strife amongst the knights under one Baron or Viscount. Existence of a power struggle precludes taking part in external actions (except in defense) during that turn.

Service Obligation - Military strength owed to lord in return for enfiefment.

Siege - Conflict opened by lord against a vassal (felon).

Summons - Call by lord to vassals to fulfill service obligations.

Support - Assigning vassals to assist action by or against another feudal equal.

Vassal - Person enfiefed by another and owing service obligation for the manors enfiefed.

Vassal Defiance - Conflict opened by a vassal against it's lord.

ORIGINAL POSITIONS AND OPERATIONAL LIMITS

Each player is assigned a role in the model as either a Viscount or as a Baron. Each Baron has been enfiefed by one of Viscounts and must perform service upon the Viscount's request in accordance with the Baron's dependency status.

Each player (Viscounts and Barons) has ten knights directly enfiefed to them. These knights have either strong Knight Dependency Status (KD1), and must always perform as directed. Or weak Knight Dependency Status (KD2), meaning that they do not owe any service.

Manors are the unit of land used in the model. Each manor supporting one knight. Control of manors can be transferred between players. Control of a manor implies that the knight being supported by it, is enfiefed to the controlling player and that the service of the knight can be directed, if the knight has a KD1 status.

In addition each player has one alloidal manor that he retains regardless of enfiefments, escheatments or conquests.

NUMBER OF VASSALS

VISCOUNTS - A viscount has two types of vassals; barons that the viscount has enfiefed and who have a

dependency of D1, D2, or D3 and domain knights that have been directly enfiefed by the viscount and who serve as directed, so long as they are KD1. A viscount may not have more than 22 direct vassals. A viscount may gain control of additional manors through operations of the model (conquests or escheatments). Resolution of model operations may result in the transfer of single manors or entire baronies between viscounties.

Baronies transfer with internal feudal structure intact. The baron holds the same dependency status with regard to the new viscount as he held to the old viscount. When single manors (less than whole baronies) are transfered these manors are added to the viscounts domain, with knights retaining their old status. Each domain manor supports one knight. If these additions result in a viscount having more than 22 vassals (barons plus domain knights) he must enfief barons with domain manors to reduce the total number of vassals to 22.

BARONS - A baron has one type of vassal, domain knights that have been directly enfiefed by the baron and who serve according to their status. A baron may have an unlimited number of vassals.

Barons may gain control of additional manors through operations of the model (conquest within the

viscounty, conquest outside of the viscounty, and enfiefments). When manors are transfered these manors are added to the baron's domain. Each domain manor supports one domain knight.

Additional manors gained by a baron through conquest within the viscounty are considered to have been enfiefed to the baron by the viscount. This means that service is required of these knights along with all knights directly enfiefed to the baron, in accordance with the baron's dependency status.

Additional manors gained by a baron through conquest outside the viscounty become freeheld manors. No service obligation is connected with these manors, and these manors cannot be lost through escheatment. The domain knights from freeheld manors may be used in any way chosen by the baron regardless of the baron's dependency status.

(Note: Freeheld manors transfered from one baron to another baron within a viscounty are no longer considered freeholdings and are considered to have been enfiefed by the viscount with service obligations attached.)

DEPENDENCY STATUS

BARON TO VISCOUNT

Strong Dependency Status (D1) - A vassal must support his lord sometime during his turn or break his feudal tie with his lord. See option list for particulars.

Weak Dependency Status (D2) - A vassal has some choice as to what action of his lord he will support, see option list for particulars.

Nominal Dependency Status (D3) - A vassal has complete choice over what actions he will take, see option list for particulars.

KNIGHT TO BARON AND KNIGHT TO VISCOUNT

Strong Knight Dependency Status (KD1) - The knight must perform service obligation for his lord as directed.

Weak Knight Dependency Status (KD2) - The knight will perform no service except in defence of lord from an outside threat.

FEUDAL TIES (gains and deteriorations)

If a vassal baron fulfills his feudal obligation (responds to summons) then his hold over his knights is strengthened. One KD2 knight changes to KD1 status.

If a vassal baron of status D2 or D1 fails to

support a siege (action against a vassal of your lord) called by the viscount then that baron is declared a felon and two KD1 knights change to KD2 status, for each turn that the baron is a felon. For the baron to clear felon status he must either a) initiate a vassal defiance, b) swear obedience once again to his lord or c) if the baron is not laid under siege on the next turn then the felon status is removed and the baron drops one status level (ie from D1 to D2, D2 to D3, or from D3 to independent).

Knight Felony - A player may declare any KD2 knight a felon and lay siege to his manor, providing that a majority of his remaining knights are of KD1 status.

Escheatments - A lord may escheat the land of a vassal after successfully winning either a vassal defiance initiated by the vassal or after having laid siege to the vassal.

Liege Lord - A baron must personally give service to the lord that first enfiefed him, unless he has been transfered as a result of military operations. Then his new lord is his Liege Lord. However, he must supply knights to all the lords to whom he owes service. The liege lord who puts down a vassal defiance can take only those knights and manors that he had given to that baron.

COMBAT RESOLUTION

ARMY SIZE - Viscounts, barons and knights are considered as one point each when determining the size of an army.

If a player is faced with more than one action, he must select the number of vassals from those available, that will face each action. And he must decide which action he personally will be involved in.

To determine the total number of knights available, each viscount counts the number of domain knights of his own, and the number of knights each of his supporting barons send to him, added to the number of knights sent by any supporting viscounts. Baronial armies are computed in the same manner. In an attack KD2 knights will not fight and D2 and D3 barons have a choice. In defence all knights and all but D3 barons must support.

Attack Resolution - To resolve an attack you take the number of knights each side has and either add or subtract ten percent. To determine wether the ten percent should be added or subtracted one die six is rolled, if a one is rolled then it is subtracted, if a six is rolled then the ten percent is added.

The army with the highest total is the winner. The loser loses a number of manors equal to ten percent of the difference in the relative size of the two

armies.

For example an army of 100 knights with a ten percent add (from having rolled a six) defeats an army of 50 knights subtracting ten percent (from having rolled a one). The adjusted strengths of the two armies are 110 to 45. The loser must then give up 6 (rounding down) manors.

OPERATION OF MODEL

STEP ONE

A viscount with more than 22 vassals (knights and barons) must enfief one or more of his barons with manors to reduce his total number of vassals to 22 or less. A viscount with 22 or less vassals may enfief one or more of his barons up to the total unassigned manors under his control.

STEP TWO

All barons roll two dice. If the number rolled is and 11 or 12 then that baron has a power struggle. All players with power struggles skip to STEP EIGHT with option "c". However, if the viscounty is attacked the power struggle will be ended and the baron may help to defend the viscounty.

STEP THREE

All viscounts secretly select one of the following options:

a) Attack - another viscount or any baron with freeholdings

b) Lay Siege - Move against a felon or any baron with D3 status or a knight with KD2 status or

c) Nothing

All viscounts then reveal which option they

selected simultaneously.

STEP FOUR

If the viscount chose to do Nothing in STEP THREE and is not attacked he may choose to support any other viscount in either an attack or in defence. The supporting of another viscount involves no risk whatsoever. Any manors lost in the action come only from the attacked viscounty, however, any manors gained must be divided with the supporters.

STEP FIVE

If a viscount is involved in some action then he summons his barons.

STEP SIX

Barons inform viscount if they will support him:

D1 -- If baron fails to support his lord then he becomes a felon.

D2 -- If baron fails to support a siege then he becomes a felon.

D3 - May support or not at own discretion.

STEP SEVEN

Resolve viscount initiated actions.

STEP EIGHT

All barons may now select one of following options:

a) Attack - another baron

b) Vassal Defiance

c) Lay Siege or

d) Nothing

D1 barons may not choose a) Attack.

All options should be declared simultaneously if possible.

STEP NINE

All barons doing Nothing from STEP EIGHT may choose to become involved in any action taking place within their own viscounty. D1 barons may not support any action against their viscount.

STEP TEN

Viscount chooses which action taking place within his own viscounty he wishes to get involved in.

STEP ELEVEN

Resolve all conflicts resulting from STEP EIGHT. Record all changes in status and return to STEP ONE.

INSTRUCTOR NOTES

This model can be greatly modified by the students. If a student suggests it, two or more viscounts can get together and elect one of their number to be a Marquis. In turn two or more Marquis' can elect one of their number to be a Duke, etc.. Or more viscounts may be created, or barons can simply become independent. If any of these options take place, some of the distinctions between the various feudal levels may become blurred as viscounts either lose all their barons or become vassals themselves. Care needs to be taken to keep things straight, but it shouldn't be too difficult.

The two major directions the model can take are towards greater unity, such as outlined above or toward disintegration. As both represent different eras of the same period they are both just as correct as the somewhat stylized initial setup. So long as the students get some feel for feudal society then the model has succeeded.